

Dr. Gabor Mate: The modern model of psychoanalysis that does not work and why: treating a disease not the person.

Serena is a 30-year-old native woman and addict. What can you tell me, an important doctor, that I have not heard before? Later after hearing her out, I am humbled. Serena comes in for regular methadone treatments and occasionally attempts to scam me for a narcotic prescription. For her getting caught at this is nothing more than being found out in a game of hide and seek; nothing personal, it's all part of the game down here in the ghetto. Serena shares little about her inner self, personal pain or her past. She has spent over half of her life down here wired on drugs to numb her pain. Pain begets pain. To a depressed person everything is hopeless, pointless. That is what it means to be depressed. "And here is where I am humbled. I am humbled by my feebleness in helping this person. Humbled that I, am arrogant, 'white robed' MD [with a savior complex], had the arrogance to believe I had seen and heard it all. You can never see and hear it all because, for all their sordid similarities, each story in the Downtown East-side ghetto unfolded in the particular existence of a unique human being. Each one needs to be heard, witnessed, and acknowledged anew, every time it is told. And I'm especially humbled because I dared to imagine that Serena was less than the complex and luminous person that she is. Who am I to judge her desperate belief that only through drugs will she find respite from her torments? Spiritual teachings of all traditions enjoin us to see the divine in each other. Namaste, the Sanskrit holy greeting, means, "The divine in me salutes the divine in you." The divine? It is so hard for us to see the human who is worthy of respect. What have I, a self-important doctor, to offer this young Native woman whose three decades of life bear the compressed torment of generations? An antidepressant capsule every morning, dispensed with her methadone, and half an hour of my time once or twice a month. [and now that model includes a crisis hotline phone number that she will not use. Never is it about an addiction but always about the pain driving it.]" I am humbled.

Dr. Gabor Maté